

**Testimony of Robin Gwathney**

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**Full Committee Hearing on “Black Men and Boys in the District of Columbia and their Impact on the Future of the Black Family”**

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Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Waxman and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing. I am Robin Gwathney, Project Manager at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development located at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. The Heldrich Center is a non-profit, non-partisan research and policy organization focused on innovative research that strengthens workforce policy, education, and placement and training programs.

In my testimony today, I want to focus on the characteristics of effective one-stop centers and service designs for youth.

As you are well aware, the Workforce Investment Act enacted in 1998 seeks to spur the development of a customer-focused workforce system that provides job seekers with centralized services delivered through One-Stop Career Centers and their partners. The WIA is a major step toward a workforce development system that merges a myriad of agencies, nonprofits, government, and business education and training programs into an efficient and effective system that is capable of providing high quality career development and employment assistance.

During the Act's first year of full program implementation, the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration asked the John J. Heldrich Center at Rutgers University to identify, document, and

disseminate information on innovative and promising practices supporting One-Stop Career Center systems operating under the Workforce Investment Act. Additionally, the Heldrich Center, in partnership with Jobs for the Future, conducted ten site visits to local youth programs to identify promising practices in youth service delivery, ascertain the progress communities are making and identify the challenges they face in establishing comprehensive systems for serving youth. The full report can be viewed online at [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org).

The Heldrich Center staff and consultants visited 25 sites across the country to gather information on positive and innovative developments within the emerging One-Stop Career Center system for the purpose of sharing this information with the entire workforce development community. WIA One-Stop Career Centers can succeed in a variety of different ways – there is no single model for success. However, six crosscutting themes emerged from our research. They include: integrating programs and services; providing universal access, empowering individuals, sectoral strategies; incorporation of information technology; and one-stop effectiveness measures.

A number of One-Stop Career Centers have gone beyond what the law requires – merely locating agencies and programs in the same facility – and achieved an exceptional degree of service integration. Some features of this integration include forging a single, common identity that is projected to all customers and organizing services by function, not agency affiliation or program funding.

At Detroit's Workplace, customers are offered through participating partners the standard core services and career guidance. The Workplace also houses a parenting center, provides child and family development services, and legal, health and residential services. Essentially, a customer can have most, if not all, of critical work supports met the One-Stop.

In many areas of the country, WIA's emphasis on serving a universal job seeker and employer population has driven a re-engineering of the entire approach to providing workforce services. Several areas have developed model practices for giving job seekers cutting-edge information and tools so that they can make informed choices about their careers. The *Golden Crescent Workforce Development Board* (Victoria, TX) provides personal assistance and concierge-like service to customers as they explore career paths and select training courses and institutions. Customers must appear before a review committee and defend their choices. Review committee members believe that it encourages those who are sincere and want the training, while boosting the self-confidence of the customer. In addition, the Board provides customers with Individual Training Account (ITA) similar to a checking account at a bank, to be drawn upon for training. On a periodic basis, the customer is provided with an itemized statement that shows the remaining balance of the ITA.

At the same time that One-Stop systems are working to provide quality universal services, they are experimenting with addressing the needs of segments of the local workforce or workplace community. The *FutureWorks Career Center* (Springfield, MA) developed a "Working English" program that incorporates the cultural needs of Hispanic job seekers and helps them get a foot in the door and gain an understanding

of what is expected during employment interviews and on the job. The benefit of this program is not exclusive the customers. *FutureWorks* learned that a *complete* survey of the needs of a specific community yields better program design and that the cultural needs of customers need to be considered.

Almost all the one-stops profiled in our research have worldwide web sites. A number of sites have used computer technology to assist with direct customer service. The *North Central Texas Workforce Center* in Denton (TX) equipped several computers in its Resource Room with self-paced MS-Office and Windows tutorials. While Both *Worksystems Inc* (Portland, OR) ([www.worksystems.org](http://www.worksystems.org)) and NOVA (Sunnyvale, CA) ([www.novapic.org](http://www.novapic.org)) have on-line customer feedback mechanisms on their web sites that function much like on-line suggestion boxes.

The Baltimore City Youth Council provides a powerful example of the difference that collaboration and good leadership can make. Youth development services receive substantial support from the mayor and major community based organizations. To serve on the youth council, members must not miss more than two meetings without sending a representative or must vacate their seat. Also, members must be willing to bring their respective organizational resources to share at the table. Additionally, the Youth Council through Baltimore's Youth Practitioner Institute recognizes that staff capacity building is essential to preparing staff for the rigors of youth development work. All of the Service Providers staff are cross-trained and are able to make referrals between adult and youth services.

I'd like to close noting that our research supports that that WIA is predominantly a locally-driven system -- each promising initiative was responding to, and driven by, the environment surrounding it -- political, business, historic and bureaucratic. However, change requires vision and sustained commitment by local and state partners. I appreciate the interest of this Subcommittee and am prepared to respond to any questions you may have.